1. The Fortifications on Maker Heights - why they were built.

The French/Spanish Invasion which never happened 1779

The Armada of 1779 was an exceptionally large joint French and Spanish fleet intended, with the aid of a feint by the American Continental Navy, to facilitate an invasion of England, However by the time the two fleets had rendezvoused, sickness had set in. Scurvy and typhoid together with shortages in stores weakened the fleet.

In August 1779 a fleet of French and Spanish ships anchored in Cawsand Bay with 30,000 infantry and field guns on board, with an obvious intent to attack the Citadel in Plymouth and take the dockyard. Poorly provisioned and uncertain in their tactics, the French duly dropped anchor in Cawsand Bay There were 66 vessels anchored , in response there was rapid fortification along the coast. Guns were strategically placed on the heights, booms blocked narrow channels as did deliberately sunken ships.

This, at a time when only 15 British men of war could have been ranged against the French. Had the French captured Maker Heights they would have been able to bombard the city and dockyard into submission, before the need to make landing proper.. Cawsand Bay would then provide a safe base from which to attack and to supply the invading army forces.

The strength of the local garrison would not have thrown off the attack. There were only ninety-six gunners to man guns in the Citadel and on Drake's Island which then possessed twenty-one 32 pounders and two 18 pounders.

Indecision and nature were to determine the outcome. After five days at anchor the ships were forced to sea by an Easterly gale, which drove the fleet out into the Atlantic. They located the English fleet off the Scillies and were drawn back up the Channel by Sir Charles Hardy and his fleet in the hope that further English forces would join them in battle. Both flotillas decided not to lose the encounter and so neither initiated the battle. With both fleets still intact after a day of stand-off, they finally made sail for their respective home ports. Honour had been maintained, more importantly, the dis-honour of defeat most certainly had been avoided.

The resultant strengthening of fortifications at Maker and Cawsand were made permanent with many visible ramparts overlooking the bay to this day.

Rame History Group 2011